

Scenes From Bath

By Carlin Romano

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Joseph Guald started the Hyde School to save some skins.

"I went around New England saying, 'give me the kid who has potential, but whom you're reaching,'" recalled Guald, founder of the experimental school in Bath, Maine, as he relaxed Saturday evening after a performance of "Roots and Wings," the school's tour show, at Montgomery-Blair High school.

Located 40 miles northeast of Portland on 145 acres near the Maine coast, the Hyde School has grown in 13 years to over 200 boys and girls from the ages of 13 to 19. And every last one of them has to used to the footlights.

"You might call this our varsity," suggested Guald, introducing the show to several hundred friends and guests of the school.

"Roots and Wings," an eight-part revue of song and dance celebrating "the American dream" is the culmination of each student's required work in the performing arts. Everyone participates in "in-house" productions at Hyde. The staff encourages each student to blend his or her family history and sometimes troubled background into the scripting and performance of the shows. Those who do it most successfully get to "take themselves on the road."

"It used to be a school for problem kids," said Katie Schlegel, a recent graduate from Reading, Pa., "because they were the only ones the school could attract at first."

Although many students now come from privileged backgrounds, such as Jennie Lee, daughter of the former governor of Maryland, students like Michelle Correa of Chicago still look to Hyde as a place where they can "straighten out."

"In high school I was ditching classes," said Correa. "I was high every day, all the time. They threatened to expel me unless I went away to school. They made a deal. Instead of expelling me, they gave me tests that labeled me unteachable.' I was able to get money from the state that helped me to go to Hyde.

"The thing they proved to me," Correa says of the Hyde staff, "was that as far as I would go, they would go with me."

One time she went as far away as Massashusetts. "I ran away, I met someone. We got busted in Massachusetts -- stealing a car, posession of weapons and drugs."

The Hyde staff followed her there and helped represent her in court. They gradually persuaded her to channel her interest in movement into a less troublesome direction -- dance. Now she's the lead dancer in "Roots and Wings" and hopes to join a dance company in Boston in the fall.

"Mr. Gauld had noticed that some of the most successful people 10 or 15 years always looking out the window," remarked one happy mother before the show.

As it turns out, Gauld had experienced a bit of that same disaffection in his previous job as headmaster of Berwick Academy in Berwick, Maine.

"I had a lot of conflicts with the trustees in trying to bring the school down to the students and faculty. I saw that the only way I was going to do it was to start my own school with my own philosophy dominant."

Mixing with friends of the school at an after-show reception, Gauld pumped hands and flashed the sort of smile TV producers look for in the host of a Sunday morning show -- bright, constant and fueled by barrels of self-confidence. He wants his school to be different. He wants the values it teaches to be different.

"The system basically respects ability, but too many students are at the mercy of their ability. They're slotted to be mathematicians, or jocks, or scholars. We respect ability but we respect character more."

Gauld has organized the Hyde curriculum to build character by having "everyone do everthing." Asked how he handles the precocious specialist Gauld replied, "He's in trouble." And no one gets away with just paying their money and tuning out -- least of all what Gauld calls "fix-it parents."

"We don't deal with parents who want the school to fix their kids without their help. We've found that the kids who turn out to be successful are the ones whose families we've reached.

Parents are expected to come up to the Bath campus during the year to experience the curriculum themselves. They also participate in regional groups where expression and discussion of their most personal feelings are supposed to take the place of friendly chit-chat.

Sitting around at the reception, students and alumni of the Hyde School professed to have no difficulties with the school's on-campus "ethic" -- almost everyone made sure to distinguish the school ethic from a set of rules -- that excluding drinking, smoking, use of drugs and sex.

"You learn a lot about the man-woman relationship instead of just thinking about the sexual aspect of the other person," said Jennie Lee.

One of Hyde's chief axioms, which pops up repeatedly in the conversation of the students, is that "every human being has a unique potential."

"Each student," Gauld observed, "should think through his ethical beliefs for himself."